

Division 26: Training and Workforce Development, \$460 677 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr T.J. Healy, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Education and Training.

Ms K. Ho, Acting Director General.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms J. Wallace, Acting Executive Director, Policy, Planning and Innovation.

Mr G. Thompson, Executive Director, Corporate.

Mr K. Coombes, Acting Executive Director, Service Resource Management.

Ms R. Trotter, Acting Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Stanley, Director, Training Regulation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the parliamentary secretary's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a parliamentary secretary asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the election commitments in the spending changes table. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me why funding for the valuable employer incentive for adult apprentices program reduces to practically nothing by 2024–25?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a brilliant program and I am happy to inform the member for Roe about it. In short, it is capped. That is why. Further, the McGowan government committed \$5.2 million over four years to fund the gap in total wage costs for 200 mature age apprentices—that is, of course, people aged 21-plus years. We all think that we are mature age, but we are not; it is a lot earlier. This program assists employers with the additional wage costs to hire apprentices over the age of 21. The program commenced on 1 July 2021, and the first 100 places were taken up quickly. On 5 August 2021, the Premier announced that the next 100 places would be brought forward, and all 200 places in the adult apprentice program have now been allocated. The answer to the member's question is: it is because the program is capped. I am sure the member would agree that it is a brilliant program.

[12.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If it is such a brilliant program, why has it been defunded?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It was an election commitment that we announced during the election, and it was always capped in our announcement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the parliamentary secretary. Is this program open to all businesses or just small to medium-sized enterprises and group training organisations?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, all businesses are eligible except for those that received incentives under the Construction Training Fund that had their own scheme.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final question. How many businesses that are considered large or corporate businesses have received this incentive?

Mr T.J. HEALY: We do not have that information available to us, but I am happy for the member to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the third line item “Skilled Migration, Including Overseas Qualification Assessment” under the heading “Service Summary” on page 386. Can I get a bit of an understanding about that particular program?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Can the member be more precise? Does the member just want to know what the program is for and what it does?

Ms L. METTAM: I am looking at the funding going forward. This is for overseas students, I imagine.

Mr T.J. HEALY: The member may have a follow-up question. Regarding the skilled migration, including overseas qualification assessment, as a result of COVID-19 and the changes to the Australian government’s visa processing requirements, applications for the state-nominated migration program in Western Australia are currently being accepted only from applicants who were residing in Australia at the time of the application. For the member’s information, 134 additional occupations were added to the state-nominated migration program, effective from 1 July 2021.

Ms L. METTAM: To clarify: that is 134 additional occupations. I thought that the state skilled occupation list had 178 occupations to start with. The government reduced the state skills list from 178 to 118 and now there are an additional 134. Are those figures right?

Mr T.J. HEALY: That is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: By way of supplementary information, is the parliamentary secretary able to provide information on what the additional 134 skills are that have been added to the skills list since the McGowan government cut the skills list when it first came to government?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Vasse for the question. The information is available on the skilled migration website. I can tell the member that it covers construction, health, manufacturing and a number of key areas. It is all available on the website currently.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to that, is the parliamentary secretary able to identify, or at least explain, which skills in the area of health the McGowan government originally cut when it came to office?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am happy to direct the member to the website migration.wa.gov.au/services/skilled-migration-western-australia. I am happy for the member to put this question on notice but if she googles that now, she will find the information. It is under the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list schedule 1. I am happy to read out a couple of them. The occupations include clinical psychologists, dental specialists, general practitioner, hospital pharmacists, midwife, neurosurgeon and industrial pharmacist. There are a number of others, but I do not want to waste time. I am conscious of getting as many question asked as we can, but the member can find all that information on the website.

Ms L. METTAM: Hopefully, by way of supplementary information, the parliamentary secretary is able to provide a list of the number of skilled migrants who have been able to take up the offer of the reintroduced occupations in the areas of health that have been added to the skills list following the cuts that we saw with the election of the McGowan government.

Mr T.J. HEALY: This was announced only a couple of months ago. Providing the member with the information by way of supplementary information, or even through asking a question on notice about that number, would yield very low numbers because we are still collecting the applications and the data. It is probably too soon. However, I think that a well-timed question on notice a little later —

Ms L. METTAM: Well timed? We have a health crisis. I would not say it is well timed.

Mr T.J. HEALY: What I am saying about “well timed” is that we are responding to the challenges. The member queried how many occupations had been reintroduced. This was announced only last month. If the member puts in a question on notice shortly, I am sure that once the applications have been received we can reply to that question on notice, but right now there is not a lot of information.

Ms L. METTAM: Obviously, this is exacerbated by the shortage of health workers that we have in the state at this time. Given the COVID-restricted environment we are in and the priority to keep Western Australians safe, to what extent will we see an uptake in the number of health workers in Western Australia as part of this scheme? How many additional workers in the health workforce does the government anticipate it will attain?

[12.40 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I am going to give the member some rapid-fire responses to squeeze in as many questions as I can. Rather than asking for a question on notice, I will give the member the data. For the state-nominated migration program, on 24 August 2021, 81 invitations were issued for Skilled Nominated subclass 190 visas, and 70 invitations were issued for Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) subclass 491 visas. Again, that is all on the website, and I think there will be more data as more and more people seek to come to wonderful Western Australia.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, for those two visas, subclasses 190 and 491, is that for the overall list or is that specifically for health workers?

Mr T.J. HEALY: That is correct; that is for health.

Ms L. METTAM: In the area of health?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The breakdown is all on the website, if that helps. I am reading from something that we have literally printed off the internet. It is not secret.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 385 and the sixth point about the capacity and capability of TAFE colleges. It refers to capital investment and it then refers to the \$25 million investment in modern equipment. I want to focus on the \$9.9 million commitment to enable TAFE lecturers to return to industry to update their knowledge of current industry standards and practices. Can the parliamentary secretary enlighten me about that project?

Mr T.J. HEALY: It is a brilliant program to enable lecturers to return to industry. The McGowan government has committed \$9.9 million to support TAFE lecturers to return to industry to undertake professional development. This will enable TAFE lecturers to upskill in line with current industry needs. Professional development is expected to contribute to improving the industry expertise and currency of Western Australian TAFE lecturers, particularly for certain industries, such as the resources industry and those experiencing rapid technological or other workplace changes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure that there is a shortage of industry-experienced lecturers; on the other hand, it is very difficult for some of those with industry experience to blend in to the TAFE industry, if you like, due to the substantial paperwork and requirements that are put on them when they become a lecturer. Is there a package or a program that the TAFE industry is looking at to improve that crossover, if you like, from working in industry to becoming a lecturer?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think that the member is on the wrong line item. I will take his endorsement that it is a great program to get our TAFE lecturers back out into industry. The member is talking about the other end, and trying to attract people. This line item is about getting our existing lecturers to continue to grow their skills and career development while making sure that they are current with industry. I am conscious of the time. It is the wrong line item but I will give the member a freebie. Last year, we ran a recruitment drive for industry we support, whereby we went out to encourage people to come into the TAFE sector, and, in short, we provided assistance to get their certificate IV in training and assessment to allow them to teach.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will go to a new line item on page 384 under election commitments—that is, “TAFE College Lecturers Industry Placement”. I am getting a lot of feedback about good-quality people from industry who are being brought into the sector, or are wanting to take a different career path, if you like, and come into the TAFE sector and impart their knowledge, but they are finding the paperwork and the issues in dealing with computer work, I guess, quite prohibitive. Does the TAFE industry have a plan to somehow make it easier or reduce the requirements? They are quite prohibitive to people coming from the industry sector.

Mr T.J. HEALY: Again, the member is not on the right line item, but I am happy to give him the information. The community feedback that we found is that the member is right. It is the same when applying for any role. We are not afraid to have very high standards of training for all people who seek to teach and lecture across the sector. That is important. I will admit this: as with any role, it does not matter if someone goes to a mine site to work fly-in fly-out or to work in Narrogin TAFE, they will have to have an induction and a process to teach. After community consultation, we found that one of the biggest challenges for people moving from industry into TAFE roles was the certificate IV TAE. People in the community told us that that was their biggest challenge. It takes time and funds. We put a support program in place for that. After community consultation with industry and lecturers, we felt that that was one of the biggest challenges; therefore, we did our best to support those people. It is the wrong line item, but trying to attract new staff is in there. That was our feedback and that is why we addressed it in that way.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I could go to cost of services or whatever and find some line item to talk about it again, but I would like to make the final comment that it is something that is prohibitive for industry-based people who want to come into the sector. I am just passing on the feedback that I am getting. I am not going to waste any more time looking for line items; I just want to give the parliamentary secretary that feedback, because I think it is a great opportunity to bring in good-quality industry-based people who can pass on their knowledge, but it is a handbrake, if you like. No doubt, I will talk to the director general about that at some different time and place, perhaps.

Mr T.J. HEALY: If I may briefly respond, chair. I formally apologise on behalf of the Parliament for wasting the member for Roe’s time with line items. I think it is very important. I do believe that the member is genuinely saying that there is frustration with paperwork—absolutely. But things like the working with children check and administrative paperwork are core, and I do not think that we should follow the Nationals WA policy of maybe abandoning those things, if that is what the member is suggesting. It is important that we use the appropriate processes to ensure that we can get the right people and the best people in. If the member knows of other people who are

searching for work, we will happily take them in the regions. If the member is getting genuine feedback that they are struggling with qualifications, paperwork or admin, please reach out to us. We want the best people.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Madam Chair, I just confirm that it is not National Party policy to do away with working with children checks or anything else, but I will move on to another question.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for clarifying that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to spending changes on page 384. Under “Other”, we have Government Regional Officers’ Housing. Can the parliamentary secretary explain that line item through the forward estimates to me?

[12.50 pm]

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. In relation to Government Regional Officers’ Housing, budgets are updated based on Treasury GROH rent revenue forecasts in line with the tenant rent setting framework based on the latest rent collections data. As the member knows, it was very important that the McGowan government froze those rents. An amount of \$3.4 million has been budgeted for 2021–22 GROH homes across three regional TAFEs, with North Regional TAFE requiring the major share. I am not sure whether the member is aware of the complexities of delivering training in the regions, but it is more expensive and highly valued and highly essential. Housing availability and affordability is an important factor in assisting regional TAFE colleges to attract and retain lecturing staff. If it helps, this figure reflects what will be funded.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 of the budget papers and the third paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. It says that secondary school students will have increased opportunities to undertake quality, industry-relevant training. How will this translate in regional areas, where there are some real shortages in industries such as aged care?

Mr T.J. HEALY: This is a brilliant program. The member did not get a chance to ask this question in the education division, so I am really excited that he has asked it now. The year 9 taster program is going to change the way we do career conversations in schools and communities in regional and metropolitan Western Australia. It is fantastic. The \$19.2 million is to provide career taster programs to year 9 students to inform secondary students about potential careers through vocational education and training sector pathways. Again, it is about having those career conversations earlier. Around 17 000 year 9 students—that is about half the cohort—will be able to participate in the program commencing in 2022. The program will be jointly delivered around the state in metropolitan and regional areas across the TAFE and school sectors and will definitely include practical industry experiences and activities for year 9 students based on their location.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the department identified the types of industries that really are short of workers, such as aged care, which is seeing a real shortage in both metropolitan and regional areas? Is the department focused on those areas in which there is a real shortage?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Yes, we have definitely identified aged care as a priority.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What other industries has the department identified it is going to focus on in the next few years?

Mr T.J. HEALY: I thank the member for Roe for the question. There are a number of industries. There is almost no sector that is not struggling to find good-quality skilled people. However, in the context of the line item for the year 9 taster program, we are not going to just tell communities. The previous government might have just said, “We’ll just dictate from the city what needs to be done”, but we will be establishing a number of regional advisory groups. Regional communities will have a say in what they want to run in their areas for their regional year 9 taster program. I understand that what is needed might be a bit of a stretch for someone like the member, but what is needed in Esperance is different from what is needed in Geraldton, Broome and the Kimberley. Different regional communities have different needs. The regional advisory groups will determine which sectors are needed for those areas. Important things will come out. We will liaise with industry, the Department of Education, TAFEs and the community to determine the local needs. I am happy to give the member an answer to what I predict will be his next question: how many regional year 9 students do we think will participate in this program next year? We estimate that 3 432 regional year 9 students should have access to this program next calendar year. I am sure the member will agree that that is just amazing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is very good.

I refer to the table on page 389. Under “Efficiency Indicators”, there is a line item for the average cost per active training contract. I note that over the last three or four years, it seems to have increased quite dramatically. Can the parliamentary secretary explain why that increase has occurred and what the cost is?

Mr T.J. HEALY: The 2021–22 budget target of \$645 is higher than the 2020–21 estimated actual of \$457 due to costs increasing by \$5.5 million, which includes \$2.9 million reflecting the defence industry workforce employer incentive, \$2.4 million reflecting the election commitment for the employee incentive for adult apprentices,

\$2.3 million reflecting the election commitment for additional apprentices and trainees employed through group training organisations and a decrease of 1 062 in the number of active training contracts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 388 and the jobs and skills centre services. I would just like an explanation of that first paragraph. Are these jobs and skills centre services provided only to Aboriginal people and communities or are the services provided to all parts of the population?

Mr T.J. HEALY: No; they are available to everyone.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 390 and service 5, which is the procurement of training. The first paragraph says —

Procurement of Training comprises the purchasing of training delivery services from the TAFE Colleges and private training providers in accordance with the State’s priorities and the State Training Plan.

Can the parliamentary secretary explain to me how that takes place and are registered training organisations involved in that as well?

Mr T.J. HEALY: Just to clarify, is the member for Roe asking for our priorities or how we contract procurement?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, the delivery services from the TAFE colleges and private training providers.

Mr T.J. HEALY: I think the member is asking about how we contract procurement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the parliamentary secretary explain how the department procures that training from those various delivery services?

Mr T.J. HEALY: We have a contracted panel of providers and that is renewed every few years and can be funded under this.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the service summary on page 386 and service 6, “Recruitment and Management of International Students”. I imagine that there was a drop in 2021–22 due to COVID. I am interested in the number of students reflected in the reporting period and also in 2022–23.

Mr T.J. HEALY: In short, yes, there has been a drop in reaction to the COVID pandemic circumstances. The 2020–21 actual is 1 735 and the 2021–22 forward estimate is 1 167.

Ms L. METTAM: What assumptions have been made about the increase in numbers from a COVID point of view?

Mr T.J. HEALY: A number of assumptions are based on the period of time that the borders remain in their current phase and how many students we can source from onshore.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.01 to 2.00 pm